



Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

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St. Regis Mohawk Tribe Sponsors Native Student Film Fest

Akwesasne, NY. The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe was the title sponsor of the Fourth Annual Native Student Film Fest, which took place at the Galaxy Theatre in Cornwall, Ontario on Tuesday, June 17th 2008. St. Regis Mohawk Sub-Chief Stacy Adams gave the opening remarks on behalf of the Tribal Council, welcoming the students and letting them know how proud the Tribal Council is of their achievements.

The Native Student Film Fest was initiated four years ago through the efforts of Margaret Peters, a Language Curriculum Specialist for the Akwesasne Mohawk Board of Education. "My goal was to combine traditional language with modern technology," she stated. "Preservation efforts must be achieved through the teaching of the young." Some issues arose initially around the differences in dialects, but the language program creates awareness of the differences and teaches students to respect them. Margaret's original intent was to develop some resources for language preservation and awareness and the idea grew into an event and took hold with other positive aspects. The Film Fest itself helps with language revitalization.

Tsionni Fox is a teacher at the Salmon River school system and she teaches film classes which produces five to six films every year by high school students. "Since the inception of the Film Fest four years ago, it has grown and branched out. Other communities have more involvement and the Film Fest has provided opportunities to view other productions from other communities," stated Tsionni. "Our students are involved in every phase of development of the film, including deciding the genre, character development, rehearsals, the actual filming, directing, production and post-production."

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Tosakia Teni is an eighth-grade student filmmaker whose documentary production was featured at this year's Film Fest. Her film is about making maple syrup and giving thanks to the winter that has passed. As she developed her film, she could see that it needed more work and additions. "Fixing it up was the most interesting part," she said. She started to learn filming in seventh grade with help from Paul Rickerts. This is the second time one of her productions will be shown.

Tina Square is a tenth-grade student filmmaker in the Native film class and has produced a few movies. Her film, *Life of a Traditional Person* is a seven-minute documentary and captures the views of both traditional and non-traditional Mohawk people through interviews. Tina said, "The film shows views about culture and language today. I want to send the message about the importance of Mohawk language and culture and inform the viewers about how our culture has been diminished." Steven Oakes plays a role in Tina's film and is considering a pursuing an acting career but said, "I'm more about music." Tina also produced a film called *Saro's Angels* which is another seven minute production.

A seven minute feature may not seem like a lot, but every minute of film involves hours of preparation. Tina noted that bringing *Saro's Angels* to completion involved about a month of work. "I worked on this film every day at school for two to three hours a day, for three to four weeks," she said. The most difficult part of increasing film length is, "finding the people to put the time in to make longer films."

Both the Film Fest and language program have pulled Mohawk people together from across the border. The students in the audience enjoyed seeing their friends and themselves on the "big screen" and look forward to an active role in filmmaking.

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